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OFFICE OF PETITIONS

In re Application of
Lapstun, et al.
Application No. 09/575,170
Filing Date: 23 May, 2000
Attorney Docket No.: NPX011US

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DECISION

This is a decision on the petition filed on 2 June, 2006, alleging unintentional delay under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b).

For the reasons set forth below, the petition under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b) is **GRANTED**.

BACKGROUND

The record reflects that:

- Petitioner failed to reply timely and properly to the non-final Office action mailed on 23 February, 2005, with reply due absent extension of time on or before 23 May, 2005;
- the Office mailed a Notice of Abandonment on 8 May, 2006—while the Notice indicates a failure to respond timely to the 23 February, 2005, Office action, clearly, the failure of timely reply was to the 13 June, 2005, Notice as to fees informality, which Notice carried a one- (1-) month period of reply with reply due on or before 13 July, 2005;

- thus, the instant application went abandoned after midnight 13 July, 2005;
- on 2 June, 2006, Petitioner filed the instant petition (with fee), reply in the form of fees (and copies of formerly filed amendment), and made the statement of unintentional delay.

Out of an abundance of caution, Petitioners always are reminded that:

- the practice of using the former one- (1-) year deadline following abandonment as an unpaid extension of time is an unacceptable practice and gives the appearance of intentional delay; and
- those registered to practice *and* all others who make representations before the Office are reminded to inquire into the underlying facts of representations made to the Office and support averments with the appropriate documentation—since all owe to the Office the continuing duty to disclose.¹

¹ See supplement of 17 June, 1999. The Patent and Trademark Office is relying on petitioner's duty of candor and good faith and accepting a statement made by Petitioner. See Changes to Patent Practice and Procedure, 62 Fed. Reg. at 53160 and 53178, 1203 Off. Gaz. Pat. Office at 88 and 103 (responses to comments 64 and 109)(applicant obligated under 37 C.F.R. §10.18 to inquire into the underlying facts and circumstances when providing statements to the Patent and Trademark Office).

Specifically, the regulations at 37 C.F.R. §10.18 provide:

§ 10.18 Signature and certificate for correspondence filed in the Patent and Trademark Office.

- (a) For all documents filed in the Office in patent, trademark, and other non-patent matters, except for correspondence that is required to be signed by the applicant or party, each piece of correspondence filed by a practitioner in the Patent and Trademark Office must bear a signature by such practitioner complying with the provisions of §1.4(d), §1.4(e), or § 2.193(c)(1) of this chapter.
- (b) By presenting to the Office (whether by signing, filing, submitting, or later advocating) any paper, the party presenting such paper, whether a practitioner or non-practitioner, is certifying that—
- (1) All statements made therein of the party's own knowledge are true, all statements made therein on information and belief are believed to be true, and all statements made therein are made with the knowledge that whoever, in any matter within the jurisdiction of the Patent and Trademark Office, knowingly and willfully falsifies, conceals, or covers up by any trick, scheme, or device a material fact, or makes any false, fictitious or fraudulent statements or representations, or makes or uses any false writing or document knowing the same to contain any false, fictitious or fraudulent statement or entry, shall be subject to the penalties set forth under 18 U.S.C. 1001, and that violations of this paragraph may jeopardize the validity of the application or document, or the validity or enforceability of any patent, trademark registration, or certificate resulting therefrom; and
- (2) To the best of the party's knowledge, information and belief, formed after an inquiry reasonable under the circumstances, that —
- (i) The paper is not being presented for any improper purpose, such as to harass someone or to cause unnecessary delay or needless increase in the cost of prosecution before the Office;
- (ii) The claims and other legal contentions therein are warranted by existing law or by a nonfrivolous argument for the extension, modification, or reversal of existing law or the establishment of new law;
- (iii) The allegations and other factual contentions have evidentiary support or, if specifically so identified, are likely to have evidentiary support after a reasonable opportunity for further investigation or discovery; and
- (iv) The denials of factual contentions are warranted on the evidence, or if specifically so identified, are reasonably based on a lack of information or belief.
- (c) Violations of paragraph (b)(1) of this section by a practitioner or non-practitioner may jeopardize the validity of the application or document, or the validity or enforceability of any patent, trademark registration, or certificate resulting therefrom. Violations of any of paragraphs (b)(2)(i) through (iv) of this section are, after notice and reasonable opportunity to respond, subject to such sanctions as deemed appropriate by the Commissioner, or the Commissioner's designee, which may include, but are not limited to, any combination of —
- (1) Holding certain facts to have been established;
- (2) Returning papers;
- (3) Precluding a party from filing a paper, or presenting or contesting an issue;

STATUTES, REGULATIONS AND ANALYSIS

Congress has authorized the Commissioner to "revive an application if the delay is shown to the satisfaction of the Commissioner to have been "unavoidable." 35 U.S.C. §133 (1994).²

The regulations at 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) and (b) set forth the requirements for a petitioner to revive a previously unavoidably or unintentionally, respectively, abandoned application under this congressional grant of authority. The language of 35 U.S.C. §133 and 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) is clear, unambiguous, and without qualification: the delay in tendering the reply to the outstanding Office action, as well as filing the first petition seeking revival, must have been unavoidable for the reply now to be accepted on petition.³

Delays in responding properly raise the question whether delays are unavoidable.⁴ Where there is a question whether the delay was unavoidable, Petitioners must meet the burden of establishing that the delay was unavoidable within the meaning of 35 U.S.C. §133 and 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a).⁵ And the Petitioner must be diligent in attending to the matter.⁶ Failure to do so does not constitute the care required under Pratt,⁷ and so cannot satisfy the test for diligence and due care.

(By contrast, unintentional delays are those that do not satisfy the very strict statutory and

(4) Imposing a monetary sanction;

(5) Requiring a terminal disclaimer for the period of the delay; or

(6) Terminating the proceedings in the Patent and Trademark Office.

(d) Any practitioner violating the provisions of this section may also be subject to disciplinary action. See § 10.23(c)(15).

[Added 50 FR 5175, Feb. 6, 1985, effective Mar. 8, 1985; para. (a) revised, 58 FR 54494, Oct. 22, 1993, effective Nov. 22, 1993; paras. (a) & (b) revised, paras. (c) & (d) added, 62 FR 53131, Oct. 10, 1997, effective Dec. 1, 1997; para. (a) revised, 69 FR 56481, Sept. 21, 2004, effective Oct. 21, 2004]

² 35 U.S.C. §133 provides:

35 U.S.C. §133 Time for prosecuting application.

Upon failure of the applicant to prosecute the application within six months after any action therein, of which notice has been given or mailed to the applicant, or within such shorter time, not less than thirty days, as fixed by the Commissioner in such action, the application shall be regarded as abandoned by the parties thereto, unless it be shown to the satisfaction of the Commissioner that such delay was unavoidable.

³ Therefore, by example, an unavoidable delay in the payment of the Filing Fee might occur if a reply is shipped by the US Postal Service, but due to catastrophic accident, the delivery is not made.

⁴ See: *Changes to Patent Practice and Procedure; Final Rule Notice*, 62 *Fed. Reg.* at 53158-59 (October 10, 1997), 1203 *Off. Gaz. Pat. Office* at 86-87 (October 21, 1997).

⁵ See: In re Application of G, 11 USPQ2d 1378, 1380 (Comm'r Pats. 1989).

⁶ See: Diligence in Filing Petitions to Revive and Petitions to Withdraw the Holding of Abandonment, 1124 *Off. Gaz. Pat. Office* 33 (March 19, 1991). It was and is Petitioner's burden to exercise diligence in seeking either to have the holding of abandonment withdrawn or the application revived. See 1124 *Off. Gaz. Pat. Office supra*.

⁷ The test of diligence in the prosecution of an application before the Commissioner is, in the context of ordinary human affairs, the test is such care as is generally used and observed by prudent and careful persons in relation to their most important business. Ex parte Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 31 (Comm'r Pat. 1887); Ex parte Henrich, 1913 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 139, 141 (Comm'r. Pat. 1913).

regulatory requirements of unavoidable delay, and also, by definition, are not intentional.⁸))

As to the Allegation
of Unintentional Delay

The requirements for a grantable petition under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b) are the petition and fee, a statement/showing of unintentional delay, a proper reply, and—where appropriate—a terminal disclaimer and fee.

The record (including the petition filed on 2 June, 2006) does not necessitate a finding that the delay between midnight 13 July, 2005 (date of abandonment), and 2 June, 2006 (date of filing of grantable petition), was not unintentional.

Rather, the Patent and Trademark Office is relying in this matter on the duty of candor and good faith of Petitioners Lapstun and Silverbrook when accepting Petitioners' representation that the delay in filing the response was unintentional.⁹

It appears that Petitioner has satisfied the requirements of the regulation.

CONCLUSION

The petition under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b) hereby is **granted**.

The instant application is released to Technology Center 2600 for further processing in due course.

⁸ Therefore, by example, an unintentional delay in the reply might occur if the reply and transmittal form are to be prepared for shipment by the US Postal Service, but other pressing matters distract one's attention and the mail is not timely deposited for shipment.

⁹ See Changes to Patent Practice and Procedure, 62 Fed. Reg. at 53160 and 53178, 1203 Off. Gaz. Pat. Office at 88 and 103 (responses to comments 64 and 109)(applicant obligated under 37 C.F.R. §10.18 to inquire into the underlying facts and circumstances when providing the statement required by 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b) to the Patent and Trademark Office).

Telephone inquiries concerning this decision may be directed to the undersigned at (571) 272-3214.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Gillon', with a stylized flourish at the end.

John J. Gillon, Jr.
Senior Attorney
Office of Petitions